a good measure, pressed down, running over

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/53653645.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Will Graham's Dogs, Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham's Father
Additional Tags:	Medical Recovery and Treatment, Processing Trauma, The Burden of Gifts, Will Graham Helps Himself
Language:	English
Series:	Part 3 of i come from mockingbird states
Stats:	Published: 2024-02-10 Words: 8,719 Chapters: 1/1

a good measure, pressed down, running over

by chaparral_crown

Summary

The pale peach slip of an attempted delivery by the post office glares at Will.

Will glares back, drawn to it - like a little caution sign, if he is to call it something. It’s not likely that the post office would be the first to inform him of a body’s discovery, but the thought does cross his mind as he opens the door to an empty hall, stairs up to the house and down to the basement equally empty. He crinkles the slip between his jacket and prescriptions.

Will doesn’t know what he’s supposed to do with thirty oranges from Clermont, Florida.

An epilogue for "each according to its kind".

Notes

Four years since "each according to its kind" was published, and I felt like I owed it this addition that has been haunting my drafts since a Father's Day some time ago. Please note that this will make zero sense without having first read the original story, unlike Beau's one-shot that at least stood a lava cake's chance in hell of holding up by itself.

Thank you so much to all of the people who have read this series, many of you over and over, many of you in your own bound books. It's been a pleasure to share it, and a greater one to hear from you.

The pale peach slip of an attempted delivery by the post office glares at Will.

Will glares back, drawn to it - like a little caution sign, if he is to call it something. *Peligroso*, he says to himself as he grabs it with a quiet groan, his little paper bag of prescriptions clinking as he shifts. *Achtung*. *Avertissement*.

We missed you, it insists in little sans-serif letters.

The obnoxious fleshy color of the carbon paper suggests he's done something wrong, as anything involving flesh inevitably does. Will has, of course - three months ago, evidence of which is now anchored in several pieces at the bottoms of river deltas, and theoretically to never be seen again. Probably no longer a matching color, he thinks with a mental hum. He hasn't personally seen it, and so he can't speak with any veracity that this is true, other than the confidence that his father isn't a liar, and that bled, water-logged tissue looks nothing like the living kind.

Nonetheless, Will notes, fumbling for keys, recognizable.

It's not likely that the post office would be the first to inform him of a body's discovery, but the thought does cross his mind as he opens the door to an empty hall, stairs up to the house and down to the basement equally empty. Hannibal's working on his kitchen in the big farmhouse, Will reminds himself.

Will crinkles the slip between his jacket and prescriptions. It's probably another absurd piece of furniture that will go missing under mysterious circumstances, take a ride back to Portland, and necessitate the rental of a flatbed trailer like the last time he received one of these. None of Hannibal's things ever arrive without fanfare and drama - emails. Wardrobes. Abigail's ear, conspicuously absent from the side of her pale face.

But it's addressed to Will, and that makes it his problem.

Will sighs and takes the slip to the post office on Commercial Street. It looks like an old courthouse and jail, bars on the lower windows to keep people out rather than in. In the glass doors to enter, he looks a bit haggard and white faced, winded from the walk down the hill and a little anxious about what absurdity he'll be fielding today.

"Sign here," says Christine, the same clerk every time. "They wouldn't take it on the truck - no loose liquids," she adds, staring him down like he personally made that decision and chose to ignore it.

Will's mind races at that, and still comes up blank. Probably not a certified mail summons from a higher court, if it's wet. Maybe still flesh if it is.

"Anything I should know about it?" he asks, clicking the pen to scrawl his name.

She makes a strange face - grabs a standard large white mailer box from behind her, careful to hold it from the top corners. It must be heavy, her hands gone white from pressing the sides. The bottom is notably grey and damp, and sticky judging from the sigh she makes when the side of her palm catches the edge of where the stain begins.

Christine looks at the top of it. "It's from Florida?" she says as if it's a question, and that she's not looking directly at the sender information and would know better than Will, but Will manages to not mention this. She hands it to Will, sticky side down into his hands.

"Great," says Will dryly, arms startled by the weight.

He reads the address at the top, sighs in irritation and relief. He takes himself back up the hill to the safety of home, dripping and tired the whole way with rain and the contents of his mail. He shakes a handful of pills from the bottles in the white bag, and swallows them dry despite tiny labels that colorfully tell him not to.

Chew tablets before swallowing in pink. ***Take with water*** in blue.

—-

Will doesn't know what he's supposed to do with thirty oranges from Clermont, Florida.

There were forty to start that did not survive their trip as much other than a rancid drape of peel, pulp, and pith over the rest of them. He is, in the way that only someone with literal bodies hidden can be, relieved to see that its fruit when he rips the soggy ends of the box, and that barring a strongly worded letter from a postal governing body about shipping perishable items, there is nothing that merits concern.

Beau offers no letter with them, nor explanation why they're here - only the pungent insistence of cardboard soaked with pulp, suspiciously greening at the corners where the dogs try to dig their noses into the smell. Will can only picture that his father is insistent on getting them to fit in one singular flat-rate box, edibility be damned, and not even once had the same train of thought cross his mind.

Will holds one in his hand, listening to the sticky pull of it away from his fingertips - it must be nice to not think that way.

He stares at them for a long time, turning the once round fruits in his hands, admiring the splits in their rinds, sorting out the ones that seem in decent condition.

"Maybe it's the challenge of seeing how many he could cram in there as a general 'fuck you' to the government," Will posits when Hannibal walks in on him holding the citrus, asking what trouble he's found today.

Hannibal is reasonably amused by the image - Will must look absurd, frowning over free fruit, palms full and damp with their weight. He's always amused with Will though, even when he's angry with Will, or impatient, or tired of Will's sharp asides, like Will is incapable of disappointing him, his very own favorite show that comes on at the same time, on the same network.

Today, Hannibal strides up the stairs and into the house, dressed for poor weather and pink-cheeked with the outside chill where Will was simply washed out by it. He reaches down to greet Winston and Buster at either side, pulling brown gloves from his hands, absently wiping the black tear troughs on the terrier's face and some spots of juicy pulp from the countertop.

"Possibly," Hannibal hums, spinning one of the intact fruits on the white surface, rocking wet circles onto it that will have to be cleaned when they are done. He's often cavalier with Will's house this way, but Will allows him to be cavalier knowing he will clean it. "However, consider it would take a greater motivation than sticking it to Uncle Sam to get him to part with the twenty or so dollars it takes to ship them to begin with."

Will scowls at this, reaching a hand to stop the orange in its spin.

"He's never been tight with a buck," he says, feeling strangely defensive of the oranges and his father, even if Hannibal has not said anything he wouldn't think for himself. "He's never had it long enough to grab it that hard."

Hannibal nods like this all sounds very in line with his idea of Beau. "Then instead consider that Beau Graham was in possession of twenty-two dollars and a bag of oranges, and you were the first person he thought to spend them all on. You should thank him."

Will rolls his eyes. "I wouldn't rush to say he spent even that much…he probably picked them off someone's tree without permission," he sighs, leaning into the counter. "Over the fence is public property, and don't ask me how many times I've heard *that* before."

Hannibal smiles.

"Then he continues to spend whatever he has for you, and what everyone else has too," he says, and leans forward to sneak a close-lipped kiss to the side of Will's temple where the small hairs there curl soft and tight. They scratch between his skin and Hannibal's, rasping against each other.

“Did you take your evening medications yet?” Hannibal asks, lips gently moving across the fine hairs. “Are you ready for the rest?”

Will frowns and pulls away.

He shoves the bad oranges back in the box to sit sticky and stinking of Florida in the corner of the kitchen nearest to the trash. When the bright rinds peeking from the top distract him, Hannibal methodically washing the sixteen or so good ones that survive the trip from the gulf coast to the northwest shore, he closes the flaps.

Will wishes he had a cardboard box to stick Hannibal in for a moment too.

(*Funny how there’s always plenty of things, small and big and terrible, that he’ll do for you and to other people - your daddy and Hannibal alike.*)

—

Got your oranges, Will texts.

It looks lonely on the phone screen, trapped in a little colored square and rounded at the corners with things that he probably should say. Somehow it’s less friendly than all his many technicolor warnings, if still in good company.

It’s friendly enough though.

They any good? asks Beau in reply, surprisingly quick, but it’s after eight in Savannah, or Clermont, or near whatever boat launch Beau would find himself close to on a Sunday before the work week. He’ll be in a chair somewhere, already several ounces deep into his usual well drinks and in his own thoughts. He’ll reach for his phone when it buzzes to look like he’s doing something, so no one tries to talk to him.

(*“How long you been ‘dere?” you hear a lot growing up, taking careful high-toe steps down the hall to grab glasses of water but easily distracted by Beau’s grey-faced slouch in the kitchen, trying to work out how he feels so you can internalize it as your own feelings. You don’t understand Beau for most of your childhood, but you do understand that he lives in his head almost as much as you. Maybe more, unburdened by the need to understand other people, and content to drift.*)

Will takes a moment, holding the phone in one hand, scratching at the side of his face with the other, staring out into the gloom of the evening, the leafless maple outside and the spruce beyond the deck looking still and sleepy as the misting rain thickens with the night.

Next to him on the couch, Hannibal reads one of Will’s discarded books, dogs to either side of his feet on the floor. Will knows he is aware of the phone. Will wonders if he’s reading at all, or if that’s just something to be seen doing, or if he’s probably doing both, never without several plots going beneath the surface of his poised face.

I think you might have sent me orange juice instead of a flat, he replies. ***Which if that was your intent, congratulations, even if the post office wasn’t as happy about it.***

There’s a few minutes pause. Will tries to imagine what that would make Beau think - if he’d find that funny, or if it would upset him that it didn’t arrive the way he sent it. Beau doesn’t send a lot of mail. Beau doesn’t send much of anything.

Will scratches his chin again, and tries to not startle at Hannibal’s companionable arm that comes to rest on the back of the sofa.

Thought you could use some. For the vitamins, Beau eventually clarifies. ***Fight off some scurvy. Stay out of the doctor’s office for a bit. Shame they made a mess of it - real good eating when I saw them.***

Will stares at this longer than his own anemic start to the conversation, and feels bad the longer he stares.

An impulse to apologize to his father bubbles up, and a conflicting desire to ask him where he got everything to begin with alongside it. As if it's more important to validate that he's right, and Beau has been up to some municipal mischief alongside his postal rebellion for whatever reason the old man has decided is reason enough, citric acid, deficiencies of it, or good eating all being equal in his eyes.

Private Property , the half wall between Beau and the orange tree would have said, and Beau reads remarkably well.

Will doesn't quite manage a thanks, choosing to set his phone down on the arm of the sofa, but still gently charmed by the whole exchange. The last time Will told him thanks, he'd rewired his boat and obstructed justice for the murder of a state game warden on his behalf. It just hadn't felt right to *not* thank him for that, never mind having to put up with Hannibal while he was unconscious.

That's normal between them, Will tells himself, that he doesn't say thanks. There's no need for either man to state the obvious anymore than a need to say *hello*, *good night*, *how are you*.

He walks himself over to his jam jar glasses and the bottle of bourbon he has been good about drinking in small quantities since beginning to recover at home under Hannibal's hawkwatch eyes. He watches him now, having soundlessly put his book down, grey-dark of his hair glinting from the back of the blue velvet.

(*You're glad he's not in the habit of telling you no and expecting that to do anything - only interested in informing you if you should or shouldn't. An advisory vote, albeit one that never lets an interesting subject die, and ambushes you with calls to hear it again.*)

Will pulls away from the bottle. Tempting, but no - he'll need another outlet for this restlessness. He instead pulls the box from next to the trash back to the center counter, and slouches over it, turning split fruit in careful fingers.

There's nothing obviously rotten about any of it, he notices now that it's all clean - just the suburban squeamishness of eating unattractive, damaged fruit, he supposes.

“Is there anything that you can do with these?” he asks reluctantly, and gives one a squeeze until it smells of sweet-sour flesh again.

Hannibal smiles, surprised to be asked.

Will suspects Hannibal’s waited to be asked all evening, working alongside the tragic little fort that the box makes for itself, fairly bursting with suggestions that would not be well received when they are first conceived. He’s given the box considering looks, but never considering questions, perhaps sensing Will’s strange mood.

“Yes,” he says, neck craning to eye them once more, now less displeasing when washed. “I’ve been puzzling over the best way to salvage them. It’s so difficult to get good citrus here,” he adds a little dolefully, shrugging.

“They’re very fragrant,” he says, rising from the living room to stand beside Will, and cuts a split one open to pull a segment from it and take a bite. Hannibal’s not bothered by a little broken skin on an ugly fruit. He doesn’t stagger on the smell of ferment, or the waxless peels riddled with wasp bitten pits in places. He eats it with a thoughtful mouth.

(*He’s glad you’re accepting your ill-gotten gift, that you are similarly incapable of refusing his. You know perfectly well it’s not about the value of the oranges themselves that he’s glad about, or if your father meant for you to have them with breakfast or as a snack.*)

“Very ripe and rich as well,” he adds, each pull of the peel spraying mist-fine and fragrant between his fingers.

—

The first eight or so mangled oranges make their way into some of the glass jam jars under a heavy snowpack of sugar and lemon, Hannibal at last finding an excuse to return them to their intended purpose and take them out of Will’s drink rotation. Will watches the one with little faded red and green strawberries go into the sink of scalding hot water with a half smile pulled tight.

“A marmalade,” says Hannibal, shirt sleeves folded up as high as he can manage. “In the spirit of extracting all the fruit’s value despite its appearance. The Valencias are not ideal, but I would wager you aren’t particular about the historical preference for Seville oranges. The flavor will be similar on a sourdough toast in any case.”

“I’m curious what you think I *would* be particular about in a marmalade, other than the obvious,” Will says, still working at a mug of coffee, lazily buttoning himself into his clothes for the work day, coveralls wrinkled but collar still high enough to cover his purpling juncture of shoulder and neck.

(*“A couple of bruised fruits, ourselves,” you snort into the squeak of the air mattress, spent but still panting between the two of you. Hannibal is obligingly beneath you and tender, accepting of your frustrated ardor in the dark hours of the night. He sighs with a laugh into his teeth still sunk into your skin, and wisely doesn’t put a name to where you find that need for control - just licks the sweat away, tracing the furrows that his incisors leave behind, stinging.*)

“If I threw the ones your father sent away, I’d imagine,” says Hannibal, giving Will a pointed look from behind the steam of the sink, shirt collar open and not at all shy of his own little splotching bruises at the collar bone, and an unhideable plum-colored one above the Adam’s apple. “They’re yours to deem treasure or trash, not mine.”

Will doesn’t particularly like that answer, but says nothing in reply, choosing to admire the dark star point at the center of Hannibal’s neck.

He smoothes the embroidery of his name down on the front of the coveralls, ties his hair loosely at the base, and shoves it all underneath his knit hat. He tells Hannibal to put the rest of the good ones in the fridge until they think of what to do with the remaining twenty-two.

“He’ll ask me how many we had to toss when I text him next,” he says absently, shrugging on his coat, not sure what to even text but knowing he’ll feel better after a few days’ work to clear his head.

“I’m sure you’ll think of something to say,” says Hannibal, twisting a peel to see it spray.

—

A week of work doesn't clear up much of anything, except for meager storage space.

On Monday, it creates the three little gleaming jars of rind breaking down under the weight of granulated sugar and its own oils. On Tuesday night, a very nice vinaigrette from the remaining two massacred oranges, yielding what Hannibal ballpark estimates to be maybe ten percent of his daily vitamin C dietary needs, and does nothing for the fact that what he actually needs is a sunny afternoon to fight off some of the seasonal depression.

"I'm not depressed," Will says automatically, swallowing down a glass of water, Hannibal sitting at his side to swab at the skin of his arm until it's clean to whatever standard Hannibal decides is sufficient for care.

(*You hate this part of recovering - the maintenance of drugs, these ones stronger than the ones you had the first time. It reminds you that you were sick, that happened, that might happen again if you don't sit still and let Hannibal poke you with needles, contrary to every piece of you that revolts at the idea, wants you to swing your head around and bite him again at the throat and leave more than a bruise to remind him you don't forget.* ***You don't forget.***)

"Not seasonally, anyway," Will adds, and deliberately ignores the feeling of the plunger being pressed.

Beside him, Hannibal nods.

"You could go to Georgia and visit your father," he says carefully. "Maybe try one of the oranges in its native or stolen territory, depending on where he obtained them. I doubt he sent as many as he thought he was going to get into the box, if we are to read the insistence of how many he pushed in there."

"Can't just take off in the middle of the spring - out of sick and vacation days, and I have a job to do," says Will, and pretends he hasn't heard that a hundred times before too. "But I'll

call him this weekend," he says with every intention of doing so.

It sounds a little ridiculous, pleading on behalf of commercially reserved time off. Will's abandoned jobs with greater benefits than the boat shop will ever be able to offer. Hannibal's dropped more money in appliances than Will's annual salary between his own house and Will's.

It's understandable though.

Maybe not to Hannibal, but it would be to Beau.

Hannibal rubs the injection site and makes him sit still for thirty minutes, and once that is passed, takes one of the whole oranges and peels it for him, handing him one bright carpel after another without comment.

Will feels a bit like a child as he does it, but has to admit the oranges are sweet, and tart, and no matter that they travel across the country stuffed like contraband in a cheap white and blue box, are still firm between his teeth and cheek. When Hannibal cards his hands through the long hair to either side of Will's head, it still smells of them.

—

Will dreams that it is warm, and he is floating between leaves in a temperate Florida winter. Everything smells of blossoms. The sky is clear. The neighborhood from this side of the fence is peaceful, away from the road, close to the house. *Private. No solicitors. Ring for service.*

He does not mind the wasps biting at him. He does not mind hands pulling him. For one trembling second he feels like his spine will be torn out with the tree branch, and then after, two palms considering him.

Will wakes to trying to say something.

The air mattress squeaks, Buster's paws pressed scratching into his back, and Hannibal sleeping the untroubled kind of the happy and the dead, looking very blue-grey in the glow of the street lights outside.

Will shuts his eyes and presses closer.

—

Thursday morning, after a tired if inoffensive Wednesday allows Will to forget he owes a debt of words to Beau Graham, comes with a request from Hannibal to use three of the "good" oranges for glazed duck, if Will would be so kind.

(*You need to make time to talk with your daddy, you remind yourself as you pour the dogs' food out. You need to call him, you whisper to no one when you pocket your phone.* ***Shame they made a mess of it -*** *says the last text message before you look away from the rest.*)

It is not lost on Will that there remains an offensive amount of citrus to work through still, and not much in the way of space left in his refrigerator.

More offensive still are Hannibal's reminders of this, as though Will not sending a note of gratitude is a cardinal sin, but having not received the oranges himself, knows sending one on Will's behalf would probably earn him another black eye from either Will or Beau at some undisclosed date.

"Chilled oranges may last up to a month," Hannibal says, a consummate know-it-all. "But seeing as they spent a week smashed to the limit of their crush tolerance, I wager you have maybe a week."

"Thank you for the status report, Hal," Will deadpans, shaking a pill into his hand. "Could you open the pod bay doors while you're at it? Maybe use them to make juice?"

He accepts a sharp nip to the side of his ear as his due. Will combs his hair with his hands, still damp from the shower, and relaxes into Hannibal taking over that too.

There's not much use in drying it - beyond the bridge, another storm appears to swallow the Clatsop Spit with heavy rain, and what little optimism he has about the day. ***Warning - Extreme Weather***, says a little bar of text atop his phone.

His fingers ache today. His stomach does too. How much of that is the ongoing drugs and how much is general anxiety that he can't name the source of, he couldn't say. There's no getting around it being easier to have Hannibal in the shack house instead of up the hill working on his own while Will's still a little physically unsteady.

No comments on the mental steadiness, Will supplies to the open door of the refrigerator, his largest mixing bowl conspicuously filled with glaring oranges in the center of the shelves instead of stored in a drawer.

You need to call your father, the bowl says in gleaming aluminum. ***Expiring soon.***

Will slams the sleek double doors shut.

"There's literally still twenty of them in there," he says in a grumbling voice, looking away, eyes closing to the sensation of Hannibal fretting with his curling hair. "It's more than I could possibly eat before it spoiled - at least without doing anything special. Take three. Take thirteen, for god's sake."

Hannibal hums.

"But not the whole twenty?" he asks with a little smile, and continues to use careful fingers to pull wet snags out of Will's hair, unbothered by Will's answering sneer and confused unhappiness with the idea.

Will closes the fridge door, and doesn't let Hannibal walk him to the boat.

“Too wet for that today, unfortunately,” he says, grabbing the car keys. He doesn’t want to look at the tidy buttons of the boat engine anyway, newly wired and shining with affection for him that Will can’t see for all the plexiglass and plywood covering it, but knows is there.

—

Hannibal, despite his best efforts to convey a certain attitude of aloof casualness in everything that he does, is a creature of routine and habit as much as Will, Beau, and the dogs. He isn’t the unknowable shadow he could claim to be in the past, though Will suspects he would hate to hear it outloud.

So when Hannibal refuses to let a subject die, Will internally reminds himself that Hannibal is just like that. He doesn’t respect the concept of an insurmountable wall. He thinks that all things come to him in their good time, whether that’s a door or a rope over, and he watches to make sure he sees it when it does.

(*You give him no reason to think otherwise, except once when it counted, and you’re proud of that. You don’t think you would have returned from Astoria to Virginia, no matter how heartsick you felt because you are familiar with the routine of starting over thanks to your father. You eventually do all the other things that you think he has hoped for, up to and including second degree murder. Frank discussions of philosophy and ethics. Partial cohabitation and sex. Aiding and abetting. A sort of open-mouthed affection that finds knuckles and fingers with crushing jaws and reminds each other to be gentle, you still need those for now.*)

(*You think it’s likely he’ll get that first degree out of you. You think you both aren’t sure if he will be the target of it, but he’s having a good time waiting to find out.*)

“Are you ready to admit to whatever trauma response it is that you are having to being given a box of poorly packaged oranges, Will?”

Will, thinking he was enjoying his evening walk after work on a Friday, now thinks his mouth likely matches the bridge in shape and size. When there is no door or rope to climb Will’s walls, Hannibal must suppose a hammer and chisel will do nicely.

He bends down to adjust Buster's harness. He pulls Winston's rain coat more firmly in place.

"Do I give the appearance of having been traumatized, or are you just reading too deeply into a somewhat inexplicable cycle of procrastination to use the oranges that has only lasted…six days?" Will asks, looking at his phone, and hastily putting it away.

Hannibal adjusts his own gloves, dog leash in hand swaying between them. "You give the appearance of someone putting off a chore when you have never appeared uncomfortable with your father before now. I'm struggling to decide if it's the gesture, or if it's the gesture coming from *him*."

"What, you think I'd react differently to you sending me a fresh selection of poached citrus from somewhere near Disney World?"

"I think you'd react differently to me hiding a body for you," says Hannibal with a glance to their surroundings and finding no one else. "I've killed for a weeknight dinner with no guests. The value of those things are different coming from your father."

"So the oranges are bodies now," Will snorts.

"They're evidence of a crime," Hannibal says with an elegant turn of the head out towards the noise of the highway and the bridge below. The sound is better the further up the hill they go, but the passing hiss of cars on wet asphalt never really leaves them. "There wasn't any of that to upset you before. It's a petty sort of evidence for a petty sort of crime," Hannibal concedes with a shrug, "but I respect that he doesn't leave any of the other kind just lying around."

Will snorts, out of breath from the hill, and then again for a new flesh-colored slip on his entry door. ***We missed you***, says the postal service with what Will knows to be a new shipment of supplements that rattle the same as the medication, and the new interior panels of the boat down in the docks, and the pans being pulled from the cabinets next to the stove to make a savory orange carrot soup with crostini that doesn't interfere with his stomach or daily drug schedule.

“I’ll call him tomorrow, just like I said,” says Will, already turning to head back down where Christine will be waiting on Commercial Street. “It’s the weekend,” he clarifies, “and I need to go do this first.”

Hannibal nods and says nothing, save to walk downwards alongside him, dogs bounding to either side with their delight to walk twice.

—

At night, the temperate Florida winter finds him again in bed, though not resting attached from the neck up to the trees, but instead on the grass of the fenced yard. He feels mealy and sour, things wriggling beneath.

Sat beside him, one long leg bent and the other stretched out, is Beau.

“Sit awhile down here wit’ me, won’cha?” says Beau, considering the boughs of the tree, fruit crates, fish coolers, and free shipping boxes full of oranges to either side. The nighttime cold glow from the house and the moon washes the rinds down from peach-yellow-green to white-bloodless blue, looking nothing like oranges, but recognizable anyway.

“Waste not, want not, right?” asks Beau, pits in his skin, smelling of ferment.

—

Saturday dawns with a forecast for clear skies, and rather than stay for what smells like a very promising breakfast of sourdough croissants with a whipped citrus oil butter, Will opts to slip away and not hold to his word.

“I’m going out,” Will says between rubbing the sleep from his eyes and buttoning up his canvas coat. “Social errand,” he adds, grabbing four oranges from the bowl, three still rolling

around, and Hannibal takes that and his fishing gear at face value.

It's not an unfamiliar practice for Will to take off on a nice day to fish, and the late winter sky is pinking even now through the hallway window, holly bushes on the east side of the house cutting their shadows across it. He doesn't tell Hannibal where he's going, only that the dogs are going with him, but Hannibal simply asks that he go somewhere another human being could find him easily if he insists on splashing around in frigid water at this time of year.

Will is relieved to not have to explain, if a little guilty for it.

(*You think sometimes Hannibal would follow you anywhere, even if he hated it. You think he hates it more when you don't ask him to go along. You think that's frightening.*)

(*That he would follow you. That he might hate this place. That you are capable of hurting him, and you will have to be mindful of all of these things for the rest of your life.*)

Enough thinking, Will tells himself as he rumbles past ***Slow Down*** notices, early morning visitors rumbling their own way in from Portland, or maybe more thought-drenched sad men coming westward to settle into the hillside along with all their kin. Enough teeth and stings today, the dogs' tails wagging in the rearview mirror, the frown of the bridge and the proud roof peak of the house, and whatever else might come in the mail forgotten with it.

—

Clatskanie, beyond the criminally low speed limit that Will must remember to mind at all times, usually comes with the promise of plain glazed donuts and the company of two grey-haired soft handed and mouthed creatures. Will wonders sometimes if Will comes with the promise of much of anything in return other than the occasional phone call, or help clearing the leaves from the gutters, or if for old grey-haired men like Lawrence that this is more than sufficient.

Thank you for your purchase! says the receipt from the grocery store, because Clatskanie sits in the unenviable size of a town that is large enough for a grocery store, but not small or large enough for a donut shop.

Will's lived in a few of those. He's afraid to have outgrown them. He's brought a few things to share either way, just in case.

"I hope you didn't get all of those for me," says Lawrence, taking steps from the front of the house to the drive in a jaunty bright blue sweater and khaki slacks, his dog Sadie ambling at similar speed if slightly more enthusiastic tail wagging. "Would get me in trouble with the endocrinologist if you did, but I guess a little trouble on the weekends isn't so bad."

"Unless you'd prefer an egg breakfast," says Will, cheered considerably by all the dogs greeting each other, and each of the broad age spots dotting the back of the old man's hands against the railings of his porch.

Will doesn't visit as much as he should, and not just for the size of the town. Some of that is not wanting to explain the relationship to Hannibal, who is jealous of most people that Will likes as though he wants to wring the time spent out of them.

Some of that is the pressing insistence in his own head, that looking at Will Graham should be like trying to see through fogged glass that cannot be wiped down, and that all these old men Will surrounds himself with just open him up anyway, or punch through the glass, and not being ready for any more of that than he's had in a meager year.

"It's good to be useful," he comments once on a brief housecall, flinging big dinner plate sized maple leaves from atop the house, dusting fir needles from the flashing and the high gables while Lawrence sits near the closest window to chat.

"Or you just don't know how to be still for long," says Lawrence, holding his coffee with a hand that tremors lightly, the other busy pushing down Sadie's downy retriever's ears and Winston's when he wanders close enough. "You have a busy mind - you think better with something to do at the same time. My daughter's the same way."

Will doesn't think it's likely that Lawrence's daughter is much like him, but the clap on his shoulder he gets in thanks when he crawls back into the house from the roof to the high window is so like Beau that he allows for the possibility that he's wrong, and all children are

alike to each other in their parents' eyes, and that their differences are very small at the heart of their natures.

(*Your nature being that you are their hearts, wandering around and occasionally coming back. "You din't have t'come for Easter Sunday, y'know," says Beau when you are all of twenty-three and they tell you to take a day off the homicide investigations, that there's only one person back from the dead today and it's not anyone in your case files. Beau won't say it out loud, or even in any sort of words at all, but he is happy to see you - tells you he knows a good place for big mouth bass, he can borrow a buddy's boat he's sure, that there's a good dive on-*)

"You look troubled today, Will," says Lawrence from the gentle sway of a little aluminum boat that Will rents from the river docks.

Will listens to this and four oranges rolling back and forth in his cooler, wishing it were possible for him to be privately miserable the way he used to be. He keeps meaning to offer him some oranges. *"Fresh from the sunshine state!"* Will pictures himself saying, each round piece falling out of his pocket until he is light enough to float to a shoreline to be found or out to sea to be forgotten.

"Well," Lawrence amends with a hum. "You always look a bit in the pits, but you've got a particularly kicked look when you're not distracted from it."

Will sets his pole to rest in the hull of the boat, rubbing at his eyes with the back of his wrists. It feels like it's been months since the sun glared off the water like this - a hundred years of sleeping between the hospital, and home, and the low dreary clouds. The blue of the sky is an alien from his dreams, and wants to grow fruit.

"You're not supposed to see past the veneer of the sugar glaze," Will huffs.

"I'm old," Lawrence says flatly but loud, giving his reel an idle turn, red bobber on the water moving a foot or two towards them. It's charming there on the river's surface - a red Christmas ornament of a tool, cheerily rocking in the wakes and to the fish nibbling beneath, Lawrence pulling it in too slowly more often than not. "You're not the first stiff-necked kid I've had in my house, even if you are the only one since the holidays. I appreciate you

dusting me off and taking me out, but you've gotta learn to just enjoy yourself. You'll scare all the fish off with your brooding."

Will gives his own reel a turn for lack of something better to do with his hands. His foot hits the side of the cooler, and it rumbles with its contents.

Would you like an orange? Will could ask him to change the subject. *Can you help me take my mind off of the fact that I owe my father for something awful I did? Will I ever enjoy anything normal again?*

"I've got a friend I should introduce you to," he snorts, and pushes the cooler away. "He'd be thrilled to have his pet theory validated."

Lawrence laughs, and shuffles stiffly in the bench seat. "I'm just glad you have a friend, otherwise I might have to get good at fishing."

Will watches the veins in Lawrence's hand swell, the skin tighten and loosen. He wonders if Lawrence's hands remember their mean strength every once in a while, or if he was always the kind of man that's gentle and that he doesn't want to be here. Maybe men like Beau that like this sort of thing don't soften and instead get leaner and tighter and harder to chew and there isn't a seat on earth that makes him comfortable enough to stop wandering around.

"My father taught me," Will says, and finds that he misses him. "By necessity, mostly - I think he was afraid we wouldn't have much else in common. Not a big talker."

"Us old men have to find things to talk about with our kids. Life's not so exciting past a certain point," says Lawrence. "I'd bet you're more alike than you think."

Will, who hates these kinds of reminders even as he knows them, nods.

After a companionable silence of a few minutes, reels hissing, road noise from the highway looking for them at the confluence of the Clatskanie river's mouth to the Columbia,

Lawrence grabs for the pink donut box.

“I bet he thinks of you a lot,” he says, thumb creasing the lid.

—

All in all, Will catches four fish, each plunking heavily over the oranges in the cooler until the oranges can’t be seen unless a trout arches away from them to escape, each time it happens leaving a little sun burnt into Will’s eyes.

Lawrence acts like a man seeing an athlete with every catch, complimenting Will’s easy handling of the reel, where he casts, the rhythm of pulling the fish in. He asks if it doesn’t bother him putting his fingers down the fish’s mouths, or shoving them into the gills to pull the bait free and the hooks out.

“Ain’t it just that some of us are blessed?” says Lawrence, admiring the pattern of the scales.

It’s nice to be complimented, Will tells himself, and offers Lawrence one of the fish when they go back for the dogs and for lunch. Reuben sandwiches - canned sauerkraut, grocery store pastrami, packaged swiss and thousand island dressing. Familiar, maybe a special kind of meal growing up for Will, something to order at the diner on payday.

It’s nice to eat normal things, he tells himself, eats it, and leaves the last three or four bites begging it off as being too full.

Lawrence accepts and watches Will gut and descale the fish afterwards with a sort of anxious desire to be involved, but seems relieved to leave it in Will’s hands alongside putting a box full of decorations into the attic, and trimming the high branches from the bushes alongside the back of the house.

When Will finally leaves a couple of hours past noon, dogs clamoring back and forth in the mirror once more, he stops outside of Gnat Creek on the side of the road - nothing so

glamorous as the rivers. Somewhere more hidden in the trees, across from the hatchery, in spitting distance of it even.

Will opens the trunk. He pulls all four oranges out of the cooler. He doesn't toss them. He doesn't rinse them either.

Will peels them right there on the overpass, and eats every wedge with hands stinking of fish guts until he is sure he will vomit, and only keeps it down in a jealous insistence that they're a gift, they belong to him, that he'll feel better once he gets them down.

Consuming raw or undercooked foods may increase your chance of foodborne illness, he thinks a little hysterically, licking the juice from his fingers, favoring the pinprick cuts of the hook barb with his tongue.

—

"You smell like a *remojón*," says Hannibal when Will comes home.

Will would tell him that he has no business being close enough to smell that, that it wasn't as if Will smothered himself in his trout, that he doesn't know what that should even smell like or if he should be worried that Hannibal has finally put a name to a dish that he can envision Will being physically at home in, but Hannibal presses his face so insistently into the side of Will's head behind his ear and neck that Will never manages to say much of anything.

He relaxes - assesses. The dogs are milling to and from the kitchen from the stairwell entry, nails clicking against the floor. There's the smell of fresh herbs, maybe something minty, maybe something sun warmed the way the day is, all spread across the narrow counters of Will's kitchen even though Hannibal's is larger, nicer, and Hannibal wanted instead to be here and wait for Will to need him this evening. Eventually anyway, when Will is done processing whatever it is that makes men like Will Graham hate being awake and at home more than sleeping on a casual assortment of discarded blankets and air-filled plastic.

Will's not much shorter than Hannibal, if thinner, especially these days recovering, but he feels especially precious now with Hannibal's long fingered hands spread wiry and broad

along the lobed upward curve of his ribs unseen under jackets and shirts and skin.

(*So you are always smiling somewhere when you are outwardly not. You have two of them for good measure, and Hannibal feels them when he holds you like this.*)

Will presses the side of his head into Hannibal's mouth until his neck hurts. He imagines it snapping, every limb going limp, held up only by the force of the arms around him, that he is chosen this way. Picked.

Hannibal does not relent, breathing deep and even.

"Is that good?" asks Will quietly, still a little nauseous, imagining he would burst if crushed much harder, but not particularly concerned that Hannibal would save in passing fantasy. "I don't think I've had that before."

"We have three oranges and presumably some kind of trout, yes?" says Hannibal in his usual unbothered cadence, and does not loosen his grip even then.

Will sighs, starting to feel more uncomfortable than he feels desired. "I don't like to show up empty handed, if that's what you're clarifying."

Hannibal nods, squeezes with the kind of horrific force that Will knows strangles, and leaves a modest kiss to the side of Will's mouth that is likely rank with citrus and river water and the grease of a mediocre sandwich.

"Then that with the oranges will be the last of it," he says, and steps away. "Have you taken your medication yet?"

Will frowns, and groans, and acts put upon as he does whenever this question comes up, and holds very still for both the sting of the needle, as prescribed every other day, and the bite of Hannibal's teeth around his thumb that becomes a lathing kiss, enticed by the smell of rot and sugar the same as predatory insects.

—

After all the agonizing, Will doesn't call, because Beau and Will are not *phone call* people.

At least not often, or so he justifies to himself - the conditions of a call mandating that something has *happened*, or one of them is lonely or thinking about the other for too long and now there is no choice but to act on it and shoot the shit for an hour talking about nothing because they don't watch the same shows, or go to the same bars, or think about men and women the same way.

(*To Beau - no one is interesting except you. To you - everyone is interesting or disappointing to the point that you cannot talk sensibly about other people without wearing Beau's disinterest, or Hannibal's aloof curiosity.*)

(*You do not think Beau wants to hear you are not lonely anymore so you don't think to call him as much, no matter how little that was before Hannibal.*)

But Will doesn't like a gift gone unreciprocated, no matter that it was likely obtained by questionable means and transportation, and that the greater postal service of the region has likely put him on a list for suspicious use of the mail to receive goods.

And for all that agonizing about it, Will does end up finding a way to enjoy all 30 oranges from Clermont, Florida.

"If you will not talk to him, can you not send *him* something instead?" asks Hannibal from beneath Will on the sofa, who lays splayed and tired across him like a pelt more than a lover and is amusedly adjusted from time to time. "He doesn't strike me as the kind of man to have much use for spring morels or the local chocolatiers, but I have yet to not be wrong about him."

Will mulls over that, nose and eyes pressed between the blue velvet of the couch and Hannibal's shoulder, blinking tiny wet clicks into the quiet between them.

“If it wasn’t legal to obtain or ship, would you still help me?” asks Will, knowing that a normal person would assume something relatively pedestrian - perhaps firearms, or wild-grown Oregon marijuana in the rural coast fashion.

Hannibal doesn’t answer right away, though Will does feel the pull of Hannibal’s smile where he doesn’t necessarily see it. “It would be difficult to ship the entirety of the mail carrier that smashed your gift in a flat rate box, both by cubic volume and the fact that there would be no one to carry it, but a good math problem is healthy for the mind.”

Will snorts - not a real threat.

Not a serious one anyway, this time.

Hannibal rests a hand to the side of Will’s chest and rubs the long line between arm and tapering waist. “In whatever capacity I can help, Will,” he says, perfectly honest, transparent in the way Will sees him sometimes, no matter that he would hate it.

—

The hardest part of this is, as expected, finding where to ship much of anything to Beau.

Not home this week, Beau texts the first time.

Atlantic City, he texts the second. ***Tax return came back***.

Will is understanding the first time, and passingly annoyed on the second - there's that irresponsible old man that Will knows. Beau, perhaps sensing this, must understand on the third attempt that Will is earnestly trying, that the insistence suggests importance, and that Beau Graham’s boy isn’t going to send him a court summons or a bill, and maybe he should make himself a little available.

Will disagrees with the last point, of course - Beau Graham has made himself more than available anytime Will truly needs it.

Anytime, he finally texts. ***You ok?***

Which is how on a Thursday after work, Will likes to imagine the look on his father's face when he signs for an overnight delivery to the front porch of his little rental house, and receives a cold storage cooler suited for organs and tagged like it might be just that. Beau's not one for receiving mail anymore than he sends it. Will wonders if he'd even open the door for the courier thinking he was about to be set-up, sued, or subpoenaed.

CAUTION, says the biggest of the stickers, next to a bill of lading that suggests that the contents are no more alarming than some local baked goods from down the street. *Fragile. Refrigerate, Do Not Freeze. Perishable. This Side Up. Handle With Care.*

Got your fish, says a text that evening. ***Must have cost you most of your tag for the year - don't even know how to eat ten of them.***

It's kind of comical thinking about it - Will dressing and Hannibal carefully vacuum sealing ten fresh Steelhead and stacking them into tidy rows inside the styrofoam, mindful of the placement of their fins. They don't shove it full, because no matter his promise to be of assistance, Hannibal has the ethics of presentation to consider, and Will would like to still receive packages within the continental United States and can't risk another mess just yet, but it's tempting. It takes the work of two days to catch even that many, at least one of those from calling out of work.

Will snorts when he sees the text.

"What a cheeky thing," Hannibal hisses when he sees Will composing his response, his mouth the upwards curve of a rib. He glances with dark eyes at Will, a strange cutting light to them. "You surprise me, Will Graham."

The cursor blinks, waiting. Will presses send under the watchful gaze, and sees everything lit up blue, visible, *sent.*

Didn't register them, Will replies. ***Must have slipped my mind without the game warden to check. Wouldn't mind some peaches in July, if you get the chance.***

Will can't say that he sleeps better, or feels more confident, or that there's not something disturbing to the natural progression of now making jokes about these sorts of things, but there's a thank you somewhere in that.

—

(*Caution, says that something else somewhere inside you. Peligroso. Achtung. Avertissement.*)

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!